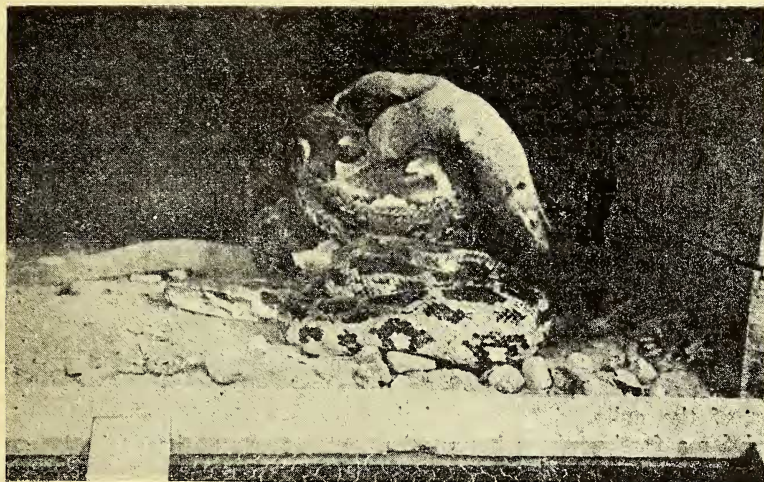


23.—INDIAN PYTHON (*PYTHON MOLURUS*) PREYING ON
MONITOR LIZARD (*VARANUS MONITOR*)

The following account of an unusual occurrence concerning the feeding habits of *Python molurus* in captivity is submitted, along with the accompanying photographs, as evidence of a peculiar action by a specimen held in captivity by the writer.



The Indian Python (*Python molurus*).

On the 15th October, 1944, a fine example of the monitor lizard (*Varanus monitor*) was captured and presented to me by a colleague. It measured 4 ft. in length and to prevent escape a rope had been fastened round the posterior of its belly just above the hind legs.

At the time of the presentation, the only available accommodation was a large vivarium already inhabited by an 8 ft. 6 inches. Indian Python (*Python molurus*) and it was decided, pending the construction of an additional box, to allow the monitor to share the snake's dwelling place. Here it must be borne in mind, to justify the writer's action in confining the two specimens to the one vivarium, that throughout the past year the python had been feeding exclusively on house rats. Further with the advent of the cold weather the snake had already been showing the usual signs of lethargy prior to the commencement of the hibernation period.

To obviate any immediate friction between the two reptiles the monitor was slowly allowed to enter the cage by a restraining grip being kept on the rope. Unfortunately, it began to burrow in a corner amongst the soft earth, using its extremely long claws to remove the soil.

Up till then the snake did not appear to have noticed the entrance of the newcomer and it was not until one of the monitor's

claws inadvertently scratched the scales of the python that the latter proceeded to exhibit any signs of interest. Upon realising the presence and close proximity of the intruder, the python struck with the speed and accuracy typical of its genus, instantaneously enveloping the monitor with all its coils. It must be explained that whereas an unsuccessful attempt was made by the writer to separate the reptiles following this catastrophe, it was decided to follow the line of better judgement and refrain from interfering for fear of putting the python off its food.

Although the lizard's head, neck, and forelimbs were free from the coils, it appeared unable to use any of these members as a means of defence—probably due to the fact that its ribs were distinctly heard to crack a few seconds after the initial constriction—and seemed passively resigned to its fate. It did, however, exhibit a tenacious hold on life and managed to survive for an hour and a quarter before dying; the pressure at that period from the coils being extremely powerful. The time was then 6-30 p.m. and all credit is due to my colleague, Mr. R. M. Rogers, in obtaining the two excellent photographs during the failing light and under difficult conditions.

It was just previous to the photographs being taken that the snake decided to remove its jaws from the hind leg of its victim. This was achieved with much difficulty owing to the extreme tightness of the coils. The constricting process, however, was continued for a further three hours when, at 9-30 pm., the snake began to swallow the lizard.

Contrary to expectations this latter operation proved an easy one for the python; the whole four feet of the monitor, plus the length of thick rope still attached to its body, disappearing within ten minutes.

The bulge inside the python was visible for 48 hours and the first discharge of excreta made its appearance on the 22nd October, seven days after the consumption. This was composed entirely of chalk. A further discharge was noted on the 1st November, seventeen days after the swallowing and upon examination was found to contain the claws, teeth and rope lead intact with the knot still tied. The remainder of the matter was indiscernible.

As I am not in a position at the present time to consult past volumes of the *J.B.N.H.S.* as works of reference, I would welcome any comments by members of the Society on these observations as I am under the impression, from past studies of the species *Python molurus*, that it has been generally assumed that its food consists almost entirely of mammals and birds. In which case I must point out that whereas the specimen referred to in these notes may be excused the initial instinctive attack on the monitor on the grounds of provocation, it had four hours in which to investigate its kill and that the swallowing action was nothing less than deliberate and without hesitation.

ALLAHABAD,
November 6, 1944.

P. MASH.